

THE INTERNET 1996 WORLD EXPOSITION

Preparing for the ApresFair: The Future of Communications

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For one year, the attention of the Internet has focused on the Internet 1996 World Exposition, a world's fair for the information age. The results have been very impressive. Five million people from 120 countries have visited the fair. Pavilions from 80 countries have highlighted the arts, technology, commerce, and government.

One of our goals in this project has been to make a difference in the Internet infrastructure: to help show what a global information infrastructure may look like in the future. The results have been particularly impressive with the Internet Railroad project.

In December of 1995, Japan was connected to the United States by a total of 14 million bits per second of bandwidth. This was not enough as any Japanese Internet user can tell you. Logging onto a US computer, surfing the web of a service like Yahoo, or moving files back and forth was painful, slow, and difficult.

In January, 1996, KDD, MCI, and Bay Networks put in place the first link of the Internet railroad, a line running at 45 million bits per second. In one day, the connection of Japan to the rest of the Internet was multiplied by four. This was the fastest international line in Internet history at the time.

The line to Japan was followed by additional contributions by KDD, Korea Telecom, and Chunghwa telecommunications in Taiwan. For the first time ever, there were direct Internet connections between different countries in Asia. This was the beginning of the Asian backbone.

These links were supplemented by many more. NTT used the Exposition to bring the Japanese national backbone up to 45 million bits per second, the same speed as the United States national backbones. Korea and Taiwan did the same. The Japanese Satellite System added lines to other parts of Asia, such as Hong Kong and Cambodia.

The Internet railroad will terminate at the end of 1996, the end of the world's fair, but a remarkable thing has happened. Spurred by the "Expo Effect," commercial providers have seen that high-speed links are technically viable and commercially viable. The international links between Japan and the US now total 350 million bits per second. A remarkable fact is that there is more Internet traffic than voice and fax combined. The Internet is the leading user of telecommunications facilities between Japan and the US.

Throughout Asia, we have seen this "Expo Effect." In Taiwan, Korea, and many other countries, commercial efforts to build high-speed national, regional, and global backbones are well advanced. The private sector is moving forward and building our global information infrastructure.

The Internet was built this way: demonstration efforts show that the technology works. The private sector sees that there is a market and brings the technology to the next stage. This does not mean, however, that our work is done. The Internet is not finished. We have many challenges ahead.

The lesson we learned from the Exposition is that cooperative activities, such as a world's fair, are what bring corporations, government, and engineers together. It is what spurs the development. We must continue these kinds of efforts. I don't know if there will be another world's fair, but I think there will be. Even if there is not, however, we must find ways to bring the community together, to build our public parks for the global village.

When we build a city, we build more than just a factory or an apartment complex. We build a living entity: a place where people live. Part of being in a community is making that community a better place. This is not simple corporate altruism: this is good for business. By making our communities better, we make our corporations better, we make our lives better.

The International Executive Committee of the world's fair is convinced of one thing: we must continue the efforts to build our public parks in the global village. Industry and government must encourage these efforts. These are not side efforts, diversions, or experiments. Projects like the Internet 1996 World Exposition are an integral part of our efforts to build a global information infrastructure. Our Official Organizers and our government partners have done well for the community and well for themselves. We hope they continue this spirit of public participation and we congratulate them on a job well done.